

The Evolution of Communications

An Interview with
Dr. Kathy Bloomgarden, Chief Executive Officer, Ruder Finn, Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE *With more than 25 years of experience in communications for multinational companies, including Novartis, Cisco, HP, Pfizer, PepsiCo, and Microsoft, Dr. Kathy Bloomgarden has developed particular skills in global communications consulting, including a focus on leadership and CEO positioning; global corporate reputation and brand strategy; acquisition/merger, global internal engagement campaigns; and crisis and issues management. Dr. Bloomgarden is the author of Trust: The Secret Weapon of Effective Business Leaders, and holds a B.A. from Brown University and an M.A. and Ph.D. from Columbia University in Political Science.*



Kathy Bloomgarden

COMPANY BRIEF *Ruder Finn, Inc. (ruderfinn.com) is one of the world's largest independent communications agencies with dual headquarters in the U.S. and China. Founded in 1948, Ruder Finn serves the global and local communication needs of over 250 corporations, governments, and nonprofit organizations. The agency is organized around four strategic pillars that reflect its core areas of expertise: Health & Wellness, Corporate Reputation & Transformation, Technology & Innovation, and Consumer Connections. RFI Studios, the agency's full-service digital practice, leads the industry in designing and developing internal collaboration platforms, building conversations and communities around brands, and staying top-of-mind in the world of mobile applications.*

What is the secret to the success of Ruder Finn and how has the firm evolved?

We were founded in New York and we have kept our heart and soul here, which is important because New York is known as a hub for creativity, innovation, and global discussion and dialogue.

As we have grown in all of these areas, we have been focused on keeping New York a leader driving the dynamic changes that are altering society and the communications sphere.

We're now in a position where we're working with one of the top five companies in multiple sectors, be it finance, insurance, food, healthcare, or technology, including companies that are redefining their business models given changes in the market.

Communication has an external piece, an internal piece, and a leadership piece in those settings. We're looking at how people go through a disruptive process individually and how companies evolve to think differently about their offerings and their customers' needs, which is integral to the work we do.

The communications field has changed so that each business must focus on how they tell their stories, creating multichannel and engaging content, and driving integrated creative campaigns relevant to individuals across audiences. One has to emotionally touch people – everything is about what this means to me now, and this sentiment is global.

We, as an agency, have adapted to help drive this integrated and creative mentality. We've brought in a new mix of talent and have maintained our internal training programs. We bring in people from all over the U.S. and the world to work in our offices in New York, and most of them stay here.

We're continuing to make New York what it is, which is a creative center where ambitious and passionate people stay and advance their careers.

How hard is it to differentiate among firms?

In an agency setting, it's often about the talent and the team. At Ruder Finn, our management is involved in client work. As agencies get larger, a hierarchy is created and there doesn't tend to be much inner engagement on a daily basis, but we have departed from that hierarchical model. I'm deeply involved in client work. I'm very close to my media contacts. I'm not sitting in my office alone. I'm very much engaged in our business and it's deeply important to me that I'm connected to our clients and our staff. We learn from each other, and we also have fun.

Also, it's important in today's world to have a creative, integrated approach to communications because we're dealing with an environment that is becoming more cluttered, and it's even more important to be authentic and memorable. We have to find a way to connect with people in a deeply meaningful manner that has true impact.

For Ruder Finn, this has always been at the heart of who we are. This has meant reinventing ourselves every day, as we believe this is an

ongoing process and if we don't adapt and push ourself to tackle new ground, we won't be groundbreaking.

We also have to be results-oriented, and Ruder Finn drives emotional campaigns that have true impact, as well as media results that help businesses tell their stories.

Is your sweet spot primarily within those larger, complex companies or is it for the emerging and entrepreneurial companies as well?

It's any company that is going through a process of business transformation. If they're operating as a start-up or in the world of the Internet, these are sometimes smaller companies but they're having an impact in ways that change our lives.

Whether it's a big multinational that is going through a change process to refocus their business or a leadership transition with new management, Ruder Finn has a lot of experience in these different settings.

Also, we can't forget that the workforce needs to be inspired in a time of change. We've grown a large internal engagement practice, which focuses on making sure the workforce is aligned, excited, and having fun, and participating as the company moves forward on a new path.

How deep is Ruder Finn's commitment to community?

People who are working at Ruder Finn really appreciate that they can spend time working on programs through our Ruder Finn Cares efforts. In different parts of the world, activities vary. We started in New York and throughout the year, different groups come together and decide what they want to participate in and how they want to give back. I try to stay involved in institutions that support New York.

Are you surprised to see how the business community in New York has come together to address the needs of the city?

Kathy Wylde (President and CEO, Partnership for New York City) is truly someone that brings everyone together. She raises difficult issues and invites in people who may not be seen as friendly to business. There is a chance for everyone to listen to each other and be exposed to different ways of thinking, all with the interest of making the city the best place to work and play.

The Partnership is the strongest group of its kind of any city I've seen in a long time. ●